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ABSTRACT

Ellen Kreger Stark, in her article, "Reforming the Critical Space," in "Critical Quarterly" discusses the gap which exists for poets writing in academic discourse, saying that she could not tell when she was writing criticism and when she was being a poet. Usually, teachers/professors say such writing is too personal, too symbolic, too emotional. Stark notes that different experiences require different languages. Wondering what it would be like to respond to exams/articles/books with poetry, Stark speaks of a "dis-encouragement of so-called creative writing in so-called theoretical classes." For Stark, cultural studies is an interesting intersection for the purposes of creative intervention into normative academic writing. Alternative forms of writing must be recognized because such forms represent, discuss, and investigate all forms of inhabited culture. (A poem expounds on the idea of creative writing to "suture the gap" between literature and criticism.) (CR)

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Julie A. Bisband

Finding My Place : Response to ***(Re)forming the critical space*** by Ellen Kreger Stark (*Critical Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3)

ED 403 566

Drinking my cup of miso soup, I relish its salty nuttiness, and raise my cardboard ceiling with my shouts of praise for Ellen Kreger Stark's ***(Re)forming the critical space***. I thank her for the title, its lowercase, colon-lacking, parentheses-using, grace, a simple poetic line. I thank her for the personal experience, forthright in detail. Foremost, I thank her for nicking an academic rock to provide a sheltered place for opinionated poets (like me, for example). This text will celebrate and explore her article, because these spaces she opens for herself in academic discourse will help others to scratch a hold or grab a branch, wriggling toward a lean-to in this craggy land of academe.

Stark starts the article discussing a gap which exists for poets writing in academic discourse. She says that she "couldn't tell when I was writing criticism and when I was being a poet" (55). This statement points out the gap/void that I always felt in turning in my "academic" articles. My emotion is right on the surface, my point of view is in the forefront, and my metaphoric sense is charged, an irrepressible sunrise. And, usually, teachers/professors say it is "too personal", "too symbolic", "too emotional". I don't blame them; they have been well taught to reject "that kind" of writing, billing it pejoratively as "emoting". This paper is not written in defense of "personal" writing, or "poetic" writing, because there is no defense: my writing style simply exists. This paper is written to connect a past, distant academic discourse I used to feel necessary with a current mixture of informed, energetic prosetry, to create an understanding which broadens the scope of "academic" writing to include poetic phrasing and discourse inclusive of subject positioning which we have celebrated *before* it has arrived in journals of repute. This is yet one more nook for a hook to grapple and hold.

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What have been the objections to these writings up to now -- and maybe still? That emotion thing. Worry from the powers that be that perhaps everyone will be able to understand and relate to our precious pedagogical/critical articles perhaps rendering them inert. We must maintain the language (and therein contained prestige) of scientific discourse and make our articles ring and hum with metadiscursive precepts, control groups, and jargon. Well, aren't I guilty of the same here by using some of that jargon? What is it that makes this piece so blasted radical? It isn't radical, that's my point. This piece is a moderately organized, perfunctorily paragraphed, page-numbered, essay which follows a general thesis in praise of Stark's article. It does possess, however, personal pronouns and figurative language. These were objectionable to those honing my writing in earlier days (when I took all criticism as law) for academability. They said it would never be published if it didn't conform. I changed the pieces for their classes and got my A's and went on writing poetically charged criticisms for fun. These I kept in my file cabinet.

Stark notes that different experiences require different languages and I agree partially with that. Some experiences I have had are best expressed in a sparse page with poetic lines, separate and sparkling like stars. Some experiences leap to a journal in dense and rich tangled leaves of thick gray prose. Stark speaks of poetic shelters containing "these events in my memory as a blur of simultaneous voices rather than in a linear, narrative hierarchy" (55). Yes. The "blur" comes in snatches of color, light, and shadow. The linear narrative comes in essays, and journalistic recollections. Not only do different experiences take form dictated by *memory*, but also shifting voices in the present moment determine which form an experience/argument will take. This piece could have been a poem if at this moment I felt the need for some breathing space for the reader. I didn't/don't feel

that this is so deep that it is necessary for the reader to have that breathing space. The ideas flow quite narratively and while I feel no hierarchy (that is, I feel that all the ideas expressed are equal in importance and no one is a necessary building block for the next), I am still telling a story here, and it does have if not a beginning, middle, and end, at least several beginnings. This narrative flow may shift into poetry at any time that I feel the words are too poignant for the denseness of the forest, and need to be placed in the middle of the field alone, or up on a hill surrounded by landscape (remember Wallace Stevens' *Anecdote of a Jar* ?).

As a poet, often I wish to respond to exams/articles/books with poetry. It seems the best vehicle for satisfaction with my text. Stark wonders what it would be like to do just that and speaks of a "dis-encouragement of so-called creative writing in so-called theoretical classes" (58). I have always felt dis-encouraged to write "creatively" -- although all writing is creative -- in academic where's-your-thesis circles. Can't a thesis be a series of inferences? Do I really have to clobber my reader with an idea I pretend to own for ten pages or so? And most poignantly, why can't we get past this notion of privileging prosaic text for "argument" and the necessity for theses?

One idea Stark explores is why *she* has chosen an essay "explaining why I think I should be allowed to write something else" (63). She says she does so to "open for myself a space in which I can do such experiments and have my work evaluated rather than consistently having my motivations questioned" (63). And speaks of her "self-imposed status as a *creative critical writer*" (63 -- emphasis mine). She speaks of creative forms of writing as tools that are at our disposal for exploration. How do we open that space to explore with creative critical writing? Stark suggests Cultural Studies as our venue.

A quite interesting intersection for the purposes of creative intervention into normative academic writing for Stark, she says, is Cultural Studies. "Cultural Studies, as I see it, is the site at which the relationship of 'critical' writing to 'creative' writing comes into crisis...The crisis I have referred to arises from the myth that this philosophy (Marxism) applies to all boundary distinctions and that everyone can be included in the happy cultural studies family" (58). She goes on to say that Cultstuds must recognize "alternative forms" of writing because it represents/discusses/ investigates all forms of the culture we inhabit. "My point is this, that to confine ourselves to standard forms of academic prose when writing critical theory is to limit ourselves to a modernist framework" (61). Because a pomo framework includes all forms of discourse -- theoretically celebrating fragments! This, of course, is fiction. Post Modernism no more embraces fragments in reality than Democrats really differ from Republicans! Fragmentary forms of discourse are still viewed as Stark says as "a move which is less rigorous than standard writing" (60). What exactly is "standard writing"? I guess it varies with the time period because in Ancient Greece/Rome, even England (!), the standard was the *poem*. So, now that we are in this country, at this time, living in this culture, Cultural Studies must be the place where the hook sinks

deep and fast
for the climber
negotiating this new terrain
with nothing but a rope of words

In Response to D.G. Myers: Righting the Promise

I learned "The Lesson of Creative Writing's History" today,
a living experience which I lived through.
Creative writing, as a discipline, should suture the gap
between
literature
and
criticism:
"Creative writing contains the promise
both of righting itself and reintegrating the study of literature...
it shapes the literary judgment by combining
the content of literature
and
the act of it."
My discipline
(I claim a space here)
can sew a fine seam,
and patch
the rent kite --
two triangles torn in two directions --
literature
and
criticism
by weaving itself through
font
by
font,
period.
Any keystroke is a choice,
any text can be re-fashioned,
turned like a clay pot,
but the clay will remain.
Is the clay given,
or chosen?:
Symbiotic -- we come from and retire to
earth.

But why pound criticism to a thin veal cutlet
because of it?
If I should find a form for what I say,
why can't that form be criticism?
Let the play of language out from its under-the-radiator-dust-bunny status!
Criticize the article,

the novel,
the poem,
with the love of language,
with an awareness of hint and titillate.

Would I apologize for writing with joy?
Never.

Am I a professional?
Certainly I profess to be one.

I do not, however, have a habit of mind that perceives a thing as a whole.
So, can't I make "literary judgments" then?
Why can't I perceive parts?:
bits of lint in pockets
re-spun into thread,
re-woven as jeans.
Study -- of words--and practice -- with words --
stitching together:
a criticism with a creative consciousness.
Bring it on.
Bring on even the "waffling bodiless interpreters"
who need a book of critijargon just to decide where to camp,
and bring on the daisy-picking lolly-gaggers
who will camp anywhere there is comfort.
Let them enter the house of conversation
where interpretivism asks whimsy to pass the poi;
if they are willing to hear there the uninterrupted dis/unity of discourse
slamming the walls like flat white paint,
surging up like a centipede,
leaving (an) (im)print.

This poem written in response to and quoting from: D.G. Myers, *The Lesson of Creative Writing's History*, AWP, v26(4), 1994.

.....will a new plum lipstick really elevate my self esteem, is that my goal? should I have goals, no. my goal is tangible: INFILTRATE such militaristic references but they apply to the academy, yes, i said the academy, i want to infiltrate the academy with language which rolls off the pen in a fury of emotion, passion, and glory, hell, i want to push the line with a freer form of language, i want to liberate the language i write in even now, free it from form and logic and feel the thought flow into this fragmented, amorphous tangent which lives breathes within these stuffy discriminatingly discursive walls where have all the ideas gone? is citing the cushion we lie back on when we have no original thought, if there can be original thought? is citing a safe, regurgitative, scholarly approach to a germ of an idea? the articles i read, and ok i'm venting, have germs and seeds of ideas wrapped in the safety net of others words suddenly made valid by being quoted -- of all the cowardly, retreating (even behind enemy lines if we must both extend the metaphor and include binaries), yellow-streaked bed-wetted sheets hung to dry in a moldy basement which chokes with its must -- and i must continue, i must pursue, some "new" idea, some revelation only cloaked in my prose not wrapped in the army issue green sleeping bag for protection against the cold, only marching toward but of course never reaching a state of compassion, a state of awareness, a state of clarity and grace, territory i can claim for my colleagues, cohorts, comrades, a territory i will be unafraid to mark alone but quite willing to explore with anyone who wants to stop this acrid and arid wasteland of sour smoke, tear-gassed and napalmed free of lyric, and rip up the bunkers where the pseudo-academes crouch, and turn the earth planting the primroses, azaleas, and hardy corn of real human feeling, idea, aspiration, theory, to nourish .